

Chapter-7 : THE INTERVIEW

By Christopher Silvester

Main Theme

The writer in this piece discusses the merits and demerits of interviews, saying that in today's world anyone who is literate must have at some point or the other read or heard an interview. People have varying opinions on interviews as to some it appears to be the only and most credible source of truth, while some, especially celebrities, regard it as unnecessary intrusion. They feel that an interview somehow reduces their status and the fact that information concerning their lives becomes public makes them feel that they have lost a little part of themselves. Lewis Carol who was the creator of, 'Alice in Wonderland, 'took pride in the fact that he spent time and energy in successfully warding off interviewers. Rudyard Kipling's wife went to the extent of saying that in her opinion interviewing was immoral. H.G. Wells kept interviewers away but ended up being an active interviewer himself on many an occasion. Notable among those he interviewed were Joseph Stalin (A Russian revolutionary) and Saul Bellow (Novelist and playwright) However, the writer opines that despite all the drawbacks, interviewing is a most valuable resource. He quotes Denis Brian who said that most of our information comes from one man asking questions of another and in this respect the interviewer is indeed powerful and influential.

Part II

Part two is an extract from an interview of Umberto Eco. Umberto Eco was a professor at the University of Bologna in Italy. Had the reputation of being a scholar and for his expertise and ideas on, Semiotics, (the study of signs) Literary interpretation, and medieval aesthetics, newspaper articles and also his literary works. His novel, 'The Name of the Rose' sold more than 10 million copies. The interviewer is Mukund Padmanabhan from 'The Hindu' in the interview, Mukund remarks that he finds it hard to understand how Umberto can manage to do all the things that he does. Umberto answers that he has mastered the art of working in what he refers to as interstices- that is the empty spaces. He means that he is able to make productive use of every minute of his day. He also tells Mukund that he has perfected the art of writing in a narrative style, something that he learnt when he was doing his doctorate but adopted very late at the age of fifty. In fact, he felt that he had become a novelist quite by accident as he enjoyed writing in a narrative style. Hence from an essayist he moved on to be a novelist. Mukund asked him how he felt when despite having written so much non-fiction and having produced some valuable work on semiotics. People still talked of him as being a famous novelist. Umberto replied that perhaps as a novelist he reached a larger readership yet, he did consider himself a serious academician and regarded himself as a university professor who wrote novels on a Sunday.

Mukund then asked him whether he was surprised to find that his novel, 'the Name of the Rose' had been appreciated by so many people despite being such a serious novel. The content of the novel was on the surface a detective novel but delved in to theology, metaphysics, and medieval history. He replied that he was not surprised as the people who had read his novel were people who were not looking for easy experiences. He also said that the success of any novel was difficult to predict as his novel, 'The Name of the Rose' contrary to all predictions made a huge success. He did not attribute the success of the novel merely to the theme of medieval history and said that it was a mystery, as such things often are.

This interview is a perfect example of how information is elicited by an interviewer and how the response of the interviewee is closely linked to the questions put forth. In this way an interview is a valuable and authentic tool for collecting information.

Important Questions based on lesson

Short Answer Type Questions

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Ques-(i) What are some of the positive views on interviews ?

Ans- Following are some of the positive views on interviews:

- (a) The interview has become a commonplace of journalism.
- (b) In its highest form an Interview is a source of truth and in practise it is an art.
- (c) An interview is a supremely serviceable medium of communication.

Ques-(ii) What do you understand by the expression “ thumbprints on his windpipe” ?

Ans- It means that it was like somebody strangled his freedom or choked the free flow of his thoughts.

Ques-(iii) When was the interview invented?

Ans- The interview was invented over 130 years ago.

Ques-(iv) Why do the opinions of the interview vary considerably ?

Ans- Thousands of famous persons have been interviewed over the years some of them been repeated So the opinions of the interview vary considerably.

Ques-(v) Which is, according to Mukund, a marked departure from academic style ?

Ans- According to Mukund, Eco’s style is a marked departure from academic style. His scholarly work has a certain playful and personal quality about it. Which is a marked departure from a regular academic style.

Ques-(vi) Why is Umberto Eco not satisfied to be only a novelist ?

Ans- Umberto Eco is not satisfied to be only a novelist because he is a university professor. He participates in academic conferences, He identifies himself with the academic community.

Long Answer Type Questions

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Ques-1- Do you think Umberto Eco likes being interviewed ?

Ans- Yes, I think Umberto Eco likes being interviewed. Following are the reasons for my opinion:

- (i) I infer from the way Umberto Eco replied the questions put by Mukund Padmanabhan that he likesbeinginterviewed.
- (ii) Eco seems to be in a relaxed mood and at ease throughout the interaction.
- (iii) Eco replies questions with patience. He never seems to be in a hurry.
- (iv) He shows his sense of humour when he says while waiting for Mukund’s elevator to come up from the first to the third floor, he has already written an article.
- (v) His statement, “ I am a professor who writes novels on Sunday’s shows that Eco likes being interviewed.

Ques-2- How does Eco find the time to write so much ?

Ans- Eco finds the time to write so much in the following way.

- (i) Umberto Eco himself says that he is a professor who writes noels on Sunday. Thus he utilises his holidays for writing work.
- (ii) He also points out that he started writing novels by accident He had nothing to do one day and so he started. Novels probably satisfied nothing to do one day and so he started. Novels probably satisfied his taste for narration. He writes from his heart. Writing being his passion he finds time anyhow or other to satisfy his passion.
- (iii) Eco himself explains how he gets time for writing We have a lot of empty spaces in our lives Eco calls these empty spaces. He says to his interviewer, Mukund, “While waiting for your elevator to come up from the first to the third floor, I have already written an article”

Thus he works in empty spaces and finds time to write so much. These moments between one action and the other actions provides him time for writing.

Additional Questions

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(1) Te writer says that it is hardly surprising that opinions of the interview vary considerably. Elaborate with reference to the essay, “The Interview, By Christopher Silvester.

(2) What were the salient points that emerged about Umberto Eco and his writing through his interview by Mukund Padmanabhan ?

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